

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 OMB-01 TRSE-00 ACDA-07 SSM-03 MCT-01
DHA-02 /070 W
-----220618Z 034310 /14

P R 211555Z MAR 77
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3402
INFO SIT-REP COLLECTIVE 239

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 1246

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, PINS, LE
SUBJECT: JUNBLATT AND AFTER

1. SUMMARY: ASSASSINATION OF KAMAL JUNBLATT AND ITS AFTERMATH HAVE BEEN SERIOUS BLOW TO LEBANON. WHILE JUNBLATT'S DEATH ELIMINATES STORMY PETREL OF LEBANESE POLITICS WHO CAUSED MUCH TROUBLE, AND WEAKENS LEFTIST FORCES HERE, IT ALSO GIVES UNDESIRABLE STIMULUS TO POLITICAL SEPARATISM. TROUBLES NOT YET OVER, AND DELICATE TASK OF POLITICAL RECONCILIATION HAS SUFFERED SETBACK. END SUMMARY.

2. I HAVE JUST COME FROM CONDOLENCE CALL ON WALID JUNBLATT AT THE DRUZE RELIGIOUS CENTER IN RAS BEIRUT. IN MIDST OF MILLING MOB SCENE WHICH WOULD HAVE DONE D.W. GRIFFITY CREDIT, I FOUND MYSELF AT ONE POINT SITTING NEXT TO SHEIKH AQL MOHAMMAD ABU SHAQRA, WHO IS PARAMOUNT RELIGIOUS LEADER OF THE DRUZE. ABU SHAQRA SMILED SADLY AND RECALLED THAT WE HAD MET ON DAY OF ASSASSINATION AND DISCUSSED SOLUTIONS FOR LEBANON'S PROBLEMS. THEN HE RAISED HIS HANDS IN DESPAIR AND SAID, "NOW THIS HAPPENS," IMPLYING HE DID
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NOT KNOW HWAT WAS COMING NEXT. THE FACT THAT MANY OF THE 150 OR SO CHRISTIANS SLAUGHTERED IN THE CHOUF WERE ALLEGEDLY SUPPORTERS OF JUNBLATT HIGHLIGHTS THE DIFFICULTIES OF PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE IN A SOCIETY WITH LEBANESE TRADITIONS AND A READY SUPPLY OF ARMS. (ALTHOUGH ARMS SEEM TO HAVE BEEN INCIDENTAL, WE ARE TOLD MOST OF THOSE KILLED IN THE CHOUF HAD THEIR

THROATS CUT RATHER THAN BEING SHOT. WHERE THERE'S
A WILL THERE'S A WAY.)

3. CONTINUED TENSION IN LEBANON FOLLOWING
ASSASSINATION DEMONSTRATES FRAGILITY OF LEBANESE
DETENTE IMPOSED BY SYRIAN PRESENCE. JUNBLATT'S
DEATH HAS PERMITTED UNDERLYING RELIGIOUS ANIMOSITIES
TO SURFACE AGAIN, NEGATING THE PLATITUDES ABOUT
COEXISTENCE WHICH LEBANESE ACROSS THE SPECTRUM ARE
WONT TO UTTER. DRUZE REACTED TO JUNBLATT'S DEATH BY
SLAUGHTERING CHRISTIANS NOT BECAUSE THEY CONVINCED
CHRISTIANS WERE RESPONSIBLE BUT BECAUSE CHRISTIANS
ARE TRADITIONAL ENEMIES AND THEY HAD TO VENT THEIR
WRATH ON SOMEONE.

4. SEPARATIST TENDENCIES OF CHRISTIANS ARE OF COURSE
STRENGTHENED AS RESULT. MANY CHRISTIANS HAVE FLED
CHOUF AND PARTISANS OF SEPARATE STATE HAVE BEEN
SAYING "I TOLD YOU SO." MEANWHILE CHRISTIAN LEADERS
HAVE CALLED FOR PUNISHMENT OF DRUZE RESPONSIBLE FOR
MURDER OF CHRISTIANS IN CHOUF, AND PIERRE GEMAYEL HAS
CALLED THE GOVERNMENT'S WILLINGNESS AND ABILITY TO
PUNISH PERPETRATORS A TEST BOTH OF INTENTIONS AND
FUTURE OF LEBANON. WE ARE REPORTING SEPARATELY
REPORT THAT IF THERE IS NO GOVERNMENT ACTION BY
WEDNESDAY, CHRISTIAN LEADERS WILL TAKE ACTION ON
THEIR OWN. EXACTLY WHAT IS NOT CLEAR, BUT POSSIBILITIES
FOR SERIOUS CLASHES ARE INHERENT IN THE SITUATION.

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5. ALTHOUGH JUNBLATT HIMSELF HAD NOT BEEN NOTABLY
ACTIVE IN RECENT WEEKS, OR AT LEAST HAD NOT BEEN
HEARD FROM PUBLICLY BECAUSE OF SYRIAN-INSPIRED
PRESS CENSORSHIP, HIS DISAPPEARANCE UNDOUBTEDLY
WEAKENS THE LEFT. HE WAS THE ONLY LEFTIST LEADER
WITH NATIONAL PROMINENCE AND A SOLID POLITICAL BASE
FOR HIS POWER. ELIMINATION OF TROUBLESOME JUNBLATT
COULD EVENTUALLY STRENGTHEN SARKIS'S HAND IN DEALING
WITH THE CHRISTIAN RIGHT, BECAUSE HIS LEFT FLANK WILL
NOT BE IN DANGER FOR A WHILE. IN SHORT RUN, HOWEVER,
THIS PROBABLY OUTWEIGHED BY FACT THAT JUNBLATT WAS
ONE OF THE STALWART OPPONENTS OF SEPARATISM. ON
BALANCE, CAUSE OF UNITY HAS SUFFERED SERIOUS REVERSE.

6. EVENTS OF THE PAST WEEK HAVE ALSO DEMONSTRATED
EFFECTIVENESS OF THE ARAB SECURITY FORCES, ONCE THEY
ARE IN PLACE. UNFORTUNATELY, THEY MOVED TOO SLOWLY
TO PREVENT THE INITIAL DRUZE REACTION AGAINST THE
CHRISTIANS. THANKS TO THEIR PRESENCE, SITUATION TODAY

SEEMS TO BE UNDER CONTROL, BUT THE TROUBLES ARE NOT OVER. (AS I WRITE THIS WE HAVE JUST HEARD OF ANOTHER DRUZE-CHRISTIAN KILLING IN BEIRUT.) THERE ARE TWO MAJOR DANGERS--EITHER A RETALIATION IN KIND AGAINST ONE OF THE CHRISTIAN LEADERS OR A MASSIVE CHRISTIAN REACTION AGAINST THE DRUZE FOR THE KILLINGS OF THE PAST FOUR DAYS. WHILE WE HOPE THE SYRIANS WILL BE ABLE TO COPE WITH ANY EVENTUALITY, WE HAVE TO BEAR IN MIND THAT THEIR CAPABILITIES ARE NOT LIMITLESS. WE DO NOT TODAY EXPECT THE SITUATION TO GET OUT OF HAND, BUT FRANKLY WOULD NOT BE UNDULY SURPRISED IF IT DID. THERE ARE SIMPLY TOO MANY PEOPLE WITH TOO MANY ARMS WHO BELIEVE THEIR "HONOR" REQUIRES THE SPILLING OF MORE BLOOD.

7. CURRENT SITUATION EMPHASIZES NEED FOR AN EFFECTIVE LEBANESE MILITARY FORCE AND FOR A POLITICAL CONFIDENTIAL

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RECONCILIATION, WHILE AT THE SAME TIME HIGHLIGHTING THE DIFFICULTIES OF ATTAINING THESE GOALS. THE OUTLOOK TODAY IS CLOUDY. MUCH IS GOING TO DEPEND ULTIMATELY ON THE REACTION OF THE CHRISTIANS LIVING IN THE HILLS ACROSS THE WAY. AS NOTED ABOVE, THE DELICATE TASK OF POLITICAL RAPPROCHEMENT HAS BEEN SET BACK. HOW MUCH REMAINS TO BE SEEN, BUT CERTAINLY THE OUTLOOK IS GLOOMIER THAN IT WAS A WEEK AGO. THIS UNHAPPY COUNTRY FACES PROSPECT OF YET ANOTHER TRIAL.
PARKER

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: ASSASSINATION, RELIGIOUS LEADERS, POLITICAL SITUATION, NATIONAL SECURITY THREATS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 21-Mar-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977BEIRUT01246
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770097-0382
Format: TEL
From: BEIRUT
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19770341/aaaabixk.tel
Line Count: 149
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 91865cb5-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 22-Mar-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3053535
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: JUNBLATT AND AFTER
TAGS: PFOR, PINS, LE, (JUNBLATT, KAMAL)
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/91865cb5-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009